

FLASH JACK - Maureen McCarthy

Year 8 English



Questions on Characters.

JACK.

"It was the best of times. It was the worst of times". (p.13).

- What does Jack mean by this? How can any experience be both?
- Do you think other family members would have viewed the two weeks in a similar vein? Why/Why not?

During this novel Jack faces his deepest fear of the dark in order to find his brother Frank and restore a sense of normalcy to his family (p.230 onwards). Jack is shown as having a certain inner strength.

- Does Jack have strength of character not unlike that of his father Dave?
- Is Jack a Flash Jack?

DIANA.

- What motivates Diana?
- Why does she tell Jack she has seen someone riding his skateboard (p.17)?
- For Jack "reading was like breathing" (p.135). Has not being able to read made a difference to Diana's life? What of her reactions to, and feelings about, the book *Matilda*?

Diana, even more so than others, appears to be living in some kind of fantasy world. The day they watch the robber's house and make notes (p.125) is reminiscent of television detective shows. Jack, during the robbery, feels he is "stuck in the middle of their fantasy with no way of getting out". (p.191).

- Is all of Diana's life a fantasy world, or is reality just too stark and hurtful for her?
- Diana's bedroom, in contrast to the rest of the house, is tidy and starkly bare. Her life is obviously lacking in material possessions. Jack describes it as "sad".(p. 77). Why?

FRANK.

- "In one sense it is almost Frank's story seen through the eyes of Jack".
- Is this book Frank's story?
- Is there good in Frank?
- It is Frank who comes for Jack when he is frightened as a young boy. Is this a different Frank?

SEAN.

- Is Sean less concerned about material possessions, and therefore more ready to let them go?
- Is he not as close to Frank and Jack and therefore apart from the central action?
- Is he different from his brothers in more than just physical characteristics?

DAVE LIGHTFOOT.

"As far as I'm concerned, doing the right thing is not just for when it suits you". He was really yelling at this stage. "It's important to tell the truth even when it hurts - especially when it hurts!" (p.25).

- Is Dave right?
- If he had agreed to sign the insurance forms and forgot to open the window would he really have been going against his moral code?
- Is it true, there is no one more hard headed or difficult than a reformed adherent?

HELEN LIGHTFOOT.

- Is there evidence that Jack's parents are having difficulties themselves?
- Does Jack's mother agree with her husband's stance?

Jack is consumed by his own life. His mother is going through a difficult period and she is looking for a job. On page 90 she admits she is not happy.

- Does Jack register his mother's distress and concerns?
- Is Jack's mother the emotional centre of this family?
- Look carefully at the interaction between family members during the special birthday tea for Sean (p.51 onwards). What does this tell us of Jack's mother?

THEMES AND IDEAS

Family.

- What makes a family unit work?
- What makes a family change?
- To the community Jack's family appear happy and successful. (p.57). Do all families have an external and an internal life, a public and a private face?
- Jack describes Frank as "the mystery at the heart of our family" (p.196). What does this mean?
- On page 165 Jack's feelings move from being "annoyed" and "irritated" with his father to the view that "He was the best", all in a matter of a few lines. Is this what family life is like? A continual roller coaster of strong feelings both good and bad?
- The family attends a session with a therapist (first mentioned on p.90), as the parents are concerned about how they are interacting as a family. Is this session (p.106 onwards) a success? Why/Why not?
- During the turmoil of Frank's disappearance, they miss their next session. Do you think they will return for future sessions? Why/Why not?

PARENTS/GRANDPARENTS.

- Are Jack's family and Diana's family so very different? Discuss. (6-8) sentences.

SIBLINGS/BROTHERS.

- How real is the interaction between Jack and his brothers?
- Dave says; "Boys fight, you know" (p.81), as if such interaction is to be expected. Is it, or should it be?
- Do the brothers really care for each other?

- Jack's brother Frank appears to be the most bitter and the most alienated of the family. Is this true, or is he just the least able to cope with personal interaction?

MORALLY RIGHT?

Jack's father makes a moral stand on an issue that is important to him, despite the fact that this angers those closest to him and hurts them all greatly in a material sense.

- Is what he does right?
- Why does the family have difficulty with his decision?
- Is his decision unusual? Why/Why not?

MATERIALISM.

This book has lasting messages about the value of objects and people in our lives. The loss of objects is felt deeply by all of the family after the theft.

- How does the loss affect each individual member of the family?
- Do Jack and Diana have different views on material belongings?
- Is it harder to have everything taken if you have a lot?

